

Ritual 'warfare' settled quarrels

Local Indians settled their differences in a kind of ritual "warfare" that was considerably less costly in human lives than the white man's ways, according to reports of early explorers.

Ross Cox was one of those who wrote about the Indian method of assuaging some real or imagined affront, such as the theft of a slave or Indian wife, or some action that hurt their pride. Cox, who was one of the men who started Fort Astoria as a fur trading mission, made nine trips upriver to hunt and trade. He came to know the Indians well.

Here is how their "warfare" was conducted, in Cox's own words:

"On arriving at the enemy's village they enter into a parley, and endeavor by negotiation to terminate the quarrel amicably. Sometimes a third party, who preserves strict neutrality, undertakes the office of negotiator (shades of Henry Kissinger!). But should their joint efforts fail

in procuring redress, they immediately prepare for action. Should they day be far advanced, the combat is deferred, by mutual consent, till the next morning, and they pass the intervening night in frightful yells and making use of abusive and insulting language to each other.

"They generally fight from their canoes, which they take care to incline on one side, presenting the higher flank to the enemy. And in this position, with their bodies quite bent, the battle commences. Owing to the cover of their canoes and their impenetrable armor, it is seldom bloody; and as soon as one or two men fall, the party to whom they belonged acknowledges themselves vanquished, and the combat ceases.

"Their warlike weapons are the bow and arrow, with a curious kind of double edged sword or club, two and a half feet in length by six inches in breadth. They seldom, however, fight near enough to make use of this formidable instrument."

The warriors wore armor

such as leather shirts and head protectors. They sometimes wore a kind of corset formed by thin strips of hardwood laced together with bear grass. The men

also painted their faces and bodies in various colors and with the most frightening figures.

The most important members of the warrior

canoes were women. It was their job to guide and paddle the canoes while their husbands and sons conducted their ritual battles.



HUGE COUGARS like this were more plentiful in Camas and Washougal in days gone by. James Wright, left, and Rufus Blair are shown with this big one in 1912.